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THE COUNTY AGENT IN FARMERS' COOPERATIVE DEMONSTRATION WORK.

This circular contains suggestions, born of ten years' experience of the Department in creating and developing Demonstration Work through County Agents in the South. It is not to be regarded as a directory, except as indicated. Because of the cooperation with the agricultural colleges and others in most of the Southern States where the Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work is now being conducted, County Agents should consult their State Agent under the cooperative arrangement within the State before pursuing definitely plans suggested in this circular. Every county presents a different problem, calling for variation of plan and execution. Underlying principles are here presented, in an effort to help County Agents in their work.

This circular is written for the agents of the Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work in the fifteen Southern States and is not intended for the employees of other sections.

During the past ten years, the United States Department of Agriculture, in cooperation with various agricultural colleges, State departments of agriculture, counties, associations, etc., has been developing a system of education for country people on the farms and in the homes, the objects of which are:

- (1) To readjust agriculture and rural life on a higher plane of profit, dignity and power, and, to that end,
- (2) To disseminate the information in the hands of the agricultural colleges, the federal department of agriculture, and the best farmers, and to convert such knowledge into practice.

#### HISTORY.

In the year 1904 the Department began its efforts in Texas in a small way, with the object of enabling farmers to meet a crisis brought on by the Mexican cotton boll weevil. It was necessary not only to teach the farmers how to raise cotton under boll weevil conditions, but to readjust the economic situation and take hold of the entire rural life and adapt it to the new condition. The Department was trying another system, which is sometimes still confused with the present one, namely, the putting of central demonstration farms in various parts of the country, supported by the Government or the State. Such a system was later abandoned by the Department as a failure. It did not reach the farmers and did not accomplish the object for which it was intended. In its place was tried this new and successful plan of going from farm to farm, instructing the farmer and getting him to carry on a small demonstration himself. The principles upon which this system was erected are:

- (1) That it requires personal contact between the teacher and the one to be taught to bring the best educational results.



(2) That examples or demonstrations worked out by the farmer on his own farm under careful instruction are most effective means of instruction.

(3) That centers of influence and personal leadership are essential in any broad system of educating the masses outside of school.

At first men were sent among the farmers, up and down the railroads and through the eastern Texas country generally, to carry on demonstrations with farmers. They reached a good many but their territory was too extensive for the best results. The power of example, however, was emphasized and the effect of the demonstrations immediately noticeable. The breadth of the general program made it necessary that demonstrations should not be confined to the growing of cotton under boll weevil conditions. Demonstrations along other lines were taken up for the purpose of showing farmers how they could produce their living on their own farms and, subsequently, how to improve fertility of their soil. By the year 1906 it was deemed best to confine the territory of each man to a single county and that year for the first time "County Agents" were regularly appointed.

As a direct result of the demonstrations carried on by the County Agent, neighbors and others around the demonstration farms began to consult the County Agent about farm practices on their farms, leading to a very large activity on the part of the County Agent as a general farm adviser. At the same time, organizations within the county began contributing to the salary of the local agents, developing what we now call local aid. From the first, a system was adopted of enlisting farmers around the demonstrators as cooperators, and a demonstrator was understood to mean a farmer who was carrying out the instructions of the Department on some part of his farm and whose farm was regularly visited, at least once a month, by the County Agent. A cooperator meant a farmer who was endeavoring to follow instructions and advice of the Department and to meet the County Agent from time to time, but whose farm was not visited regularly by the County Agent. About the year 1906, also, the general system of calling farmers around each demonstrator to meet the agent at the demonstration, in what is called a "Field School," was begun. These field schools have been very effective means of reaching a large number of people. In the last three years the form of the demonstrations themselves have been systematized into progressive lessons and the variety of the demonstrations extended into every branch of agriculture, including live stock.

The last development of the system has been instruction through organizations among farmers. It has been demonstrated by experience that the work can be made more effective by organization of the farmers into clubs or groups for instruction. It should be remembered that in the South we have one of the most extensive organizations of farmers in America, known as the Farmers' Union, which has been of great assistance to the Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work and has saved the necessity of organization in many counties. Other farmers' organizations have also assisted greatly. However, the process of education and the general improvement of agricultural conditions in a county can be made much more effective by the organization of farmers, either in

farmers' clubs, locals of the Farmers' Union or other existing farmers' organizations for three purposes:—

- (1) To study their local agricultural problems.
- (2) To avail themselves of the services of the County Agent and all other educational forces in the work of improving agriculture and rural life generally.
- (3) To supply a means of mutual assistance among the farmers in solving their economic problems of marketing and the purchase of supplies.

In all this work the County Agent is assisted by a District Agent, who supervises the work of from 15 to 20 county agents, and the work in the State is under the general supervision of a State Agent.

#### QUALIFICATIONS OF COUNTY AGENTS.

The success of the work in any county depends almost entirely upon the personality, education and experience of the county agent. He can make or mar the work in the county; he can do much or do little, according to his knowledge, his ability, and his devotion to his work. The surrounding circumstances are most important considerations.

Qualifications should be looked at under three heads:

- (1) Personality.
- (2) Education.
- (3) Practical experience.

Under the first should be grouped such things as the physique, tact, character, and other general qualities that go to make up a real leader, among which should be considered desire for service or missionary spirit. Under the second, the scientific training of the man in agriculture and his general educational qualifications. And under the third division should be grouped his practical experience as a farmer and his experience and training as a business man, for he must not only be a safe adviser on agricultural subjects but also a safe business adviser. Practical experience and standing among farmers as a farmer is one of the most important items. The scientific training is equally important, but the county agent with scientific training but no practical experience as a farmer, is seriously handicapped in his work and should not be selected. The County Agent is not expected to be an expert in all branches of agriculture. His work should be supplemented by specialists from the extension division of the colleges of agriculture and from the United States Department of Agriculture. His greatest asset is his opportunity to acquire knowledge from his wide observation of many farms and his contact with experts along special lines.

#### ORGANIZATION OF THE COUNTY AGENT'S WORK.

The activities of the County Agent's work are so numerous that he is in great danger of falling into the error of over-work and under-effect. It is possible for the County Agent to spend a great deal of time and energy in trying to reach many farmers in his county and answer their inquiries without having any definite plan for progress in the agricultural development of his county as a whole. He must study the situa-



tion, study the needs of his people, and work consistently to lead them along the road to real progress. It is not necessary that the whole plan be laid before the people. Real progress may be made by doing the most obvious thing and then awaiting the opportunity to take the next step.

The work of the County Agent may be divided into three general divisions:

(1) He is a source of information for the farmers of his county, and the connecting link between them and the College of Agriculture, the Experiment Station, and the United States Department of Agriculture. He gives advice, counsel and information on agricultural subjects to all those who apply to him. He talks to farmers at meetings of farmers' clubs, farmers' unions and other places. He cooperates with the extension force of the agricultural college and other agricultural organizations. He helps to organize and conduct the farmers' institutes, in cooperation with the forces engaged in that line of work. He holds field schools, as outlined above.

(2) He conducts demonstrations on a number of farms in the county. On these farms he secures the cooperation of the farmer to carry out the instructions of the Department and Agricultural College on a portion of the farm, either in the production of some crop, or the feeding, care and breeding of live stock, or some other branch of agricultural endeavor which relates closely to the principal agricultural problems of the county. These demonstrations he visits regularly. At them he holds field meetings or schools. He uses these examples as illustrations, not only for the farmers on whose farms they are conducted, but for the neighbors as well. These are his centers of influence. On these demonstrations he should give nothing in the way of compensation, seed, fertilizer, or anything else except information. If better seed is needed, the farmer should be persuaded to purchase it or it should be obtained through some local organization. For plans of progressive demonstrations, see book of instructions to County Agents. Demonstrations are one of the most important and effective means of meeting conditions. They bear exactly the same relation to this system that laboratory practice and shop practice do to the teaching of agriculture and mechanic arts in colleges.

(3) For the purposes indicated above, organizations of farmers are an important adjunct of all educational activities, as well as business activities. The following general principles should be adhered to as directions. Unless some cooperating force has organized the farmers of the county or is willing to organize them, and such organized farmers are willing and ready to avail themselves of the help of the County Agent, then it is desirable that the County Agent take some steps for the organization of his county for this purpose. If local organizations already exist, then he should, if possible, avail himself of the help of these organizations. He should not endeavor to organize farmers into associations or clubs at variance with or in opposition to existing cooperative organizations in the county. If the county is thoroughly organized by any farmers' cooperative organization, he should at once offer to cooperate with such organization by giving its members instruction and working with it as an organization if possible. He should not refuse to



help any man, whether he be a member of the organization or not, but should disseminate information about the value of cooperation and encourage farmers who are not members of organizations to become such.

Where there is no local organization of the farmers, he should begin in a simple way by organizing neighborhood farmers' clubs to meet once a month and study their own farm problems, with the help of the Agent, and begin demonstrating the value of improved methods. Some of the oldest and most successful of these farmers' clubs have been organized with a membership of twelve, meeting once each month at the farms of the members alternately. In some sections an effective organization would be found possible by school districts. Then the clubs or local unions in a larger subdivision of the county, such as a township or other subdivision, can be federated together and then all in the county united by some central organization. Where any properly conducted farmers' organization is able to handle the situation the local agent should cooperate as indicated, by encouraging the farmers' association to complete an effective plan of organization. It is important that the County Agent remember that he is not, under any circumstances, to become an organizer for any particular farmers' organization or association. When he has organized the farmers' clubs for the study of their situation and they begin the further work of cooperation in marketing or the purchase of supplies, then he should cease to be the organizer for them but continue to help them with advice and information on agricultural subjects and place them in touch with experts in marketing, etc., if such there be. After those steps are taken, the farmers must do the work of organization themselves or through their own association. The County Agent, however, still stands ready and willing to encourage such activities and to give them instruction on such subjects as the value of uniformity and high quality of production, as the first step in cooperative marketing. His membership in farmers' organizations is not prohibited, but he must remember always to instruct and not assume the duties of those whom he is seeking to encourage to act for themselves.

He should remember, however, the limitations to be set upon his work and should not permit himself to become anything more than an educator, a counsellor, a guide, an instructor. Above all, he should not permit himself or the machinery which he represents to become the business agent or the purchasing agent of the farmer's supplies or for the sale of his products. That is the farmer's own business. Neither the State nor the Federal government can afford to take up that business for many reasons, but principally for the reason that such a course is paternalistic and fails to develop the initiative and self-reliance on the part of the farmer, so necessary to the best and most virile civilization in the country. The farmers should be taught to understand the distinction between educational activities and activities of a business character. It is to be hoped and expected that the farmer will be glad to receive instruction and to profit by the information he may receive from educational forces. It is to be hoped that he will readily receive persons representing the State or the Federal government and their guidance in perfecting organizations but it is also very important that he should be taught that when

the organization has been perfected he must rely upon the organization and not upon the State or the Federal government for its success. Associations for special purposes may also be organized to unite all who have special common interests such as live stock associations, alfalfa clubs, cow testing associations, seed breeding clubs, etc.

If a County Agent has a county so organized and he is properly in touch with local farmers' clubs, farmers' unions or other farmers' organizations in every school district or community in the county through the leader of such club, he will find the assistance so given can be used effectively in any campaign to help the farmers generally in the county. For example, in the eradication of hog cholera, an organization among farmers to report outbreaks of the cholera, to telephone the news in speedily and thus secure the administration of the serum as quickly as possible, and to work together for the prevention of the spread of the disease by agreeing among themselves to stay out of infected pens, to keep visitors and people generally from going to and from infected places, to disinfect, etc., will prove of great value. The same system of organization can be made very effective in the boll weevil campaign by united effort among the best farmers to produce their own supplies, to plant the best varieties of cotton, to reduce acreage, to make a thorough fight against the weevil in every cotton field, and to secure diversification and prevent panic and disorder in the face of the weevil. The same plan may be used in any other effort to rid the farmer of crop or animal diseases.

If the county agent seeks therefore to make his work effective through organizations, he should remember:

(1) To work with, but not under, existing organizations which have for their objects only educational or business activities.

(2) If there are none of these, to organize simple clubs by communities or associations by community of interest.

(3) To remain always an adviser and helper.

(4) To refrain from becoming an organizer for a farmers' association already engaged in business or in organization work.

(5) To refrain from becoming a business or fiscal agent of any organization or any farmer.

These are the three lines of work of the County Agent,—Information, Demonstration, Organization. Or, the educational, the practical, and the business side of farming.

#### • ADDITIONAL HELP.—WOMEN AGENTS.

In the future development of the work, the County Agent must not only have the assistance of organization within his county, but of other county instructors to help on the general program of improvement. We have already started along this line in the development of the women's side of this kind of instruction through the Girls' Canning and Poultry Club Work. In about 75 counties there is already a woman paid for practically her entire time. The work has been begun in about 250 counties. It is confidently expected that this will lead ultimately to the employment of a woman County Agent to carry on club work among girls and help the farm women as systematically on their side of the farm problem as the County Agent helps the men and boys on the farm



problems outside of the house, and in the same way and by the same methods. If the funds are sufficient in the future, it is conceivable that assistants to the County Agent might be employed who would take up special lines of work, such as truck gardening, live stock, dairying, etc. The type of men for these assistants should be the same as for the County Agent,—practical, experienced, well trained men. This is a matter for the future.

#### MISTAKES TO BE AVOIDED.

There are some mistakes which the County Agent should avoid:

(1) He should thoroughly understand the limitations put upon his efforts. As pointed out above, he must confine himself to educational effort and avoid the mistake of becoming a business agent.

(2) He should avoid the mistake of working merely with the best farmers. To obtain the confidence of farmers generally in his county, he should go to work quietly to demonstrate his own ability to the best farmers and get them with him. But they are not the ones who chiefly need his assistance. He should lay careful plans to reach the poorest farmers in his county and help them. His most effective work can be done with those who need him most. He should be the friend of the tenant farmer and of the man struggling under the weight of a debt.

(3) He should avoid all participation in local factional strifes, particularly political campaigns. He should be an earnest advocate of all that is good for the county, but he should remember that his success depends entirely upon his standing with the farmers generally and that he can not actively take sides in political, religious and factional controversies without losing his hold on a part of those whom he should serve.

(4) He should avoid scattering his work and wasting his effort through lack of plan. A timely campaign with some definite object will often prove of great value. He should seek the dominant needs, press them with great vigor, and take up the next need as he sees it.

(5) Above all he should be patient and avoid the error of trying to rush the farmer on any program. It takes slow, hard work, well planned, to bring results. Farmers are conservative and do not change methods or do new things suddenly. A sensational campaign in the papers often accomplishes a great deal of good in a city campaign for better political conditions, but it will not change fixed habits in the country. A card-index, a roll-top desk, a lot of oratory and noise are not sufficient to reform rural conditions and will not add a single element of happiness to a rural home. The County Agent must be content when he sees some good being accomplished, and be inspired by every step of progress to be patient and work hard.

#### ASSISTANCE FROM EXPERTS.

As said before, the County Agent is not an expert on all subjects. He should learn to avail himself of the knowledge and assistance of the experts of the Agricultural College and in the United States Department of Agriculture, where the services are needed. He should learn to organize his work in this direction so as to make the work of an expert most effective. He should know and locate the farmers who need some special service and see that the expert reaches the man who will put the knowl-



edge given into practice. Local organizations will prove most effective, as pointed out above.

#### SUMMARY.

We should remember that there are three great lines of activity in the solution of the agricultural problems in this country:

(1) Educational activities,—by which I mean efforts of the agricultural colleges, the common schools, the agricultural schools of secondary degree, institutes, extension work, and the work of County Agents, or Farm Demonstration Work, all aimed at the improvement of conditions in the country through the putting into practice of the best known methods of economic production, soil improvement, home improvement, rural improvement.

(2) Business activities,—by which I mean cooperative production, marketing and purchase of supplies.

(3) Financial activities,—by which I refer to rural credit, both on real estate security for long time and on personal security for short time.

Of course, there are other activities, such as religious, social, sanitary, etc., which will have their place in any broad program of rural improvement. Machinery is needed for each of the activities mentioned. Activities under the first head above come within the legitimate province of the State and Nation. As to the second division, the educational activity can educate along those lines but the activity itself must emanate from, and be controlled by, the farmer for his interest. All such activities must be through organizations presided over by farmers for their own mutual benefit, the policies of which are fixed by them and not by those whose economic interests are antagonistic.

As to the third activity, the machinery must be provided by governmental enactment, either State or National, but here again education is needed, and individual initiative on the part of the farmer. Here there may reasonably be cooperation between organizations of farmers and organizations of business men.

Simplicity of organization is much to be desired. If two, three, or a dozen organizations are in the field doing exactly the same kind of work in the same locality, it is not only confusing to the farmer but results in wasted energy and lack of efficiency. There should be one organization dealing with the rural schools, one organization doing police work in agriculture, and one organization carrying the information to the farmer, and one cooperative organization dealing with the business side in each community. We are inclined to have too many organizations in this country. It is not intended to say that there should be only one organization for the whole country along these lines, but simply that for each locality, each county, or each community there should be simplicity of organization, as pointed out above. Then cooperation between various organizations with different objects will bring about the proper and logical co-ordination of effort in any given community. This may not be attained at once but by slow degrees it should be guided to this end.

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